

## La Salle University La Salle University Digital Commons

---

Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues

La Salle University Art Museum

---

9-2002

# Memorial Paintings for September 11, 2001 by Dennis McNally SJ

La Salle University Art Museum

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/exhibition\\_catalogues](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/exhibition_catalogues)



Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#), and the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

---

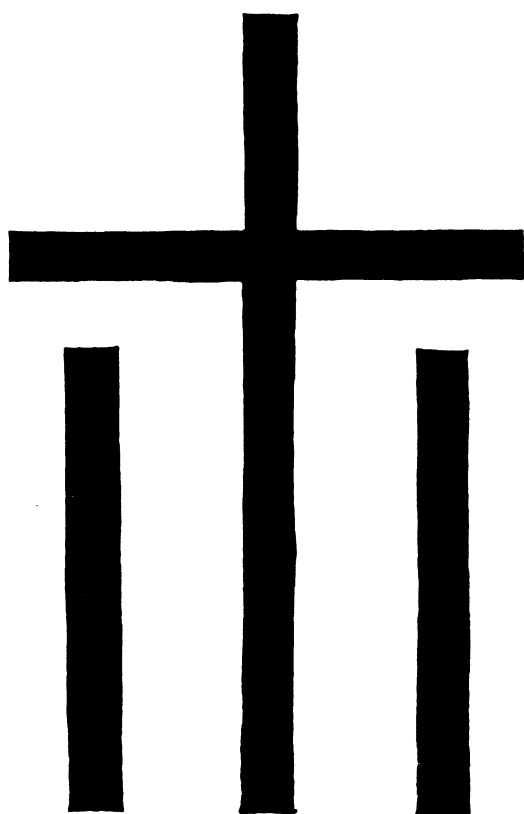
### Recommended Citation

La Salle University Art Museum, "Memorial Paintings for September 11, 2001 by Dennis McNally SJ" (2002). *Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues*. 18.

[http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/exhibition\\_catalogues/18](http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/exhibition_catalogues/18)

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the La Salle University Art Museum at La Salle University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art Museum Exhibition Catalogues by an authorized administrator of La Salle University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [careyc@lasalle.edu](mailto:careyc@lasalle.edu).

**IX / XI**



# ***MEMORIAL PAINTINGS***

**FOR SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

**BY DENNIS McNALLY, SJ**

***La Salle University  
Art Museum  
September 2002***

*Few tragedies in the history of the United States have had the force and scope as New York's on September 11, 2001. The response of Americans and others in the city and around the world to the destruction of the Twin Towers and to the death of thousands who worked there was profound and intense – emotions that were expressed in notes, posters, photos, TV coverage and, finally, in art. On the first anniversary of that catastrophe, one still searches for some adequate expression of sorrow and hope, some ex voto that will be worthy of the victims and the noble response of people to them. Over the past year, one Philadelphia artist has produced a series of paintings that come close.*

## THE ARTIST

Fr. Dennis McNally is the chairman of the Arts Department of St. Joseph's University. He has taught the history of art and applied art for many years and has published two books on religious art, *Sacred Space: An Aesthetic for the Liturgical Environment* (1985) and *Fearsome Edifice: A History of the Decorated Domus in Catholic Churches* (2002).

On his web site, Fr. McNally notes some of the tension between art and religion and some of the possible harmony in the church:

“Art and architecture can help us to pray; they should be treated respectfully. As a priest I want art, good art, to express and form a healthy prayer life in the church. As an art professional, I want real art commissioned and great art preserved. The dichotomy in America between the art world and the world of religion is a sad indicator of the unholy fears that divide the Church.

The conflict between art and religion has been too often resolved by rules on one side and abandonment on the other. But it is a most welcome reality that, now at least, the conflict takes the form of dialogue where, until recently, there had been

silence. In fact, Pope Paul VI effectively encouraged this conflict when, in a 1964 address to artists, he said for himself and his predecessors of this century:

We have insisted on this or that tradition to be followed; we have set up these canons from which you must not deviate; we have oppressed you at times, as it were, with a cloak of lead...

For this we beg your pardon.

With cloak of lead removed, the expression of the Faith of the Church in sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century Emilia, Venice, Spain, and France can become common again. Art and architecture can be real, and the American Church would have an aesthetic experience that could be prologue to a religious one. This depends on the risk, informed risk, that communities must take. We must commission artists to do unique and real art for our churches. In the competitive art world lie the seeds of a real American church culture. Private devotion could flourish and would infuse mass culture. Thy kingdom come. Amen.”

## THE PAINTINGS

The four paintings in the exhibition are in a genre which Fr. McNally calls “Landscapes of Tragedy and Hope.”

1. *Look Teacher, Even the Birds are on Fire*  
Acrylic on canvas  
52” x 96”

The Twin Towers are depicted in two panels side by side, “one collapsing, the other in flames, with a couple of bodies falling and many images of souls ascending as paper caught in the updraft.”

2. *The Statue of Liberty*  
Acrylic on canvas  
23 ½” x 35½”

America’s symbol of unity in diversity is depicted here with the towers in a misty background. In the present context, the painting ironically recalls the bright and clean September day of the tragedy.



3. *Girdle for the Grieving*

Acrylic on canvas

56" x 52"

The Square wherein the Towers disappear and reappear in blackness "highlights the blue ribbon girdle of the Virgin. This sash was a key symbol in a medieval fable of the doubting Apostle Thomas. Arriving belatedly after the Virgin's death, he was skeptical about her reported physical assumption into heaven. Demanding that her grave be opened, he found it empty – and had a vision of Mary in heaven, dropping her sash on him to conjure his disbelief but also to console him.

4. *Over the Horizon, Follow the Signs, into the Valley. Pay Close Attention to the Sign of the Cross.*

Acrylic on Canvas, A Triptych

48" x 32" wings

48" x 48" center

A calm evening in the far West is depicted in this night scene, with the flickering lights in the valley and the looming cross, symbol of hope and peace after great suffering.

